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LAWRENCE SHAFFER

Night for Day, Film for Life

"We linger unregenerately in Plato's cave, still reveling, our age-old habit, in mere images of the truth."—SUSAN SONTAG

The most melancholy comment in *All About Eve* is George Sanders's lament at Margo's party that Margo and Bill, as they head upstairs, are going to finish a spat they've been having "off-stage." Terrible news for the voyeur! *All About Eve* is a film about theatricality—Eve pretends to be something she's not, Margo is always "on," the principals upstage each other in a hectic sextet—but for us Sanders might have said "off-film." A death sentence. Like off the edge of the flat world for the medieval explorer or beyond the curvature of the universe for the modern astronomer.

In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin refers to the way in which photography robs real objects of their aura and art objects of their ritualistic cult value. What Benjamin failed to anticipate was film in itself as ritualistic cult object. *All About Eve*—like *Casablanca*, *The Outcast of the Islands*, *One-Eyed Jacks*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *On the Waterfront*, *Now, Voyager*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*—is a cult film watched ad infinitum on TV or at all-night Bogart, Davis, Brando film debauches in such theatres as the Elgin in New York City. At the Elgin the faithful sit through trilogies and tetralogies from 12 to 6 A.M. to hear their favorite lines coming out of their favorite faces:

"He gave me no selection." (Brando to Malden after killing Timothy Carey in *One-Eyed Jacks*)

"Life is foul." (Richardson to himself in *The Outcast of the Islands*)

"You are my shame." (Richardson to Howard in *Outcast*)

"You're maudlin and full of self-pity. You're magnificent." (Sanders to Davis in *All About Eve*)

"I don't like the country. The crickets make me nervous." (Brando to Saint in *On the Waterfront*)

"We may not have the moon, Jerry. But at least we have the stars." (Davis to Heinreich in *Now, Voyager*)

"Is this the last of Rio?" (The dying Robinson to no one in particular in *Little Caesar*. Or to the film-maker, the true arbiter in this matter.)

The film cultist waits for his moments in a different fashion from the theater or opera buff. The latter dote on the way their heroes render someone else's creation. But cult-film dialogue is completely identified with the film personality. "Here's looking at you, kid" can only come from Bogart, no one else. The Elgin is our version of Plato's cave. Except that the prisoners savor their servitude. When the lights go on at 6, to reveal a blank screen, the desolate viewers, eyes forsaken, stumble like fearful vampires into the dawn. What lights on and screen blank had revealed was the appalling fact that behind Appearances was—nothing.

Sanders committed suicide in 1972, bidding adieu to "this sweet cesspool" because he was "bored." He died in character. Why couldn't he have been satisfied watching *All About Eve* for the rest of his life? In a sufficiently humane, technologically advanced society, those afflicted with unbearable ennui could be given the Proustian option of watching their past on film, with freeze-frame, reverse, and slow-motion buttons at their side. For film actors, who already have this option (their past on film = their past films), the trouble is that they can never appreci-

ate themselves or their films as we do. Their delightful idiosyncrasy is apparent only to others; being inside the fragmented, out-of-sequential-order, carpentered making of a film destroys the illusion of being *in* it. That illusion belongs only to the viewer. So Sanders has disappeared while the illusion of him haunts late-night movies on television. Such a here-he-isn't, there-he-is polarity, our modern literalization of Plato's allegory, would have terrified the old philosopher, seeing his metaphor for real.

When such as Davis, Howard, Bergman, Olivier, Brando, and Hepburn appear on talk shows, they want to talk about their life (social concerns, anecdotes) not their films. They don't see their films—as cult objects—the way we do. They don't see their films at all. In a certain science fiction story, a man in his office suddenly sees it being dismantled by stagehands as, at the same time, his mistress-secretary removes her wig and abruptly exits. The man is an actor who has fallen off the edge. The stars see nothing but the dismantling. We could watch *Casablanca* over and over forever, but Bogart and Bergman were never even in *Casablanca*. This kind of dislocation may not seem so true of someone like Jean Pierre Léaud, who though he has lived his life from one film to another, just the way his persona in *Day for Night* has (when Truffaut tells him in *Day for Night* that for people like them film is everything and “life” of no consequence, one sees all the films they've made together in a flash—Léaud from 14 to 30), inhabits films so apparently filled with the actual texture of street-café-apartment life that there seems little or no divorce from the real world. But for Léaud, too, the streets, cafés, and apartments of his films have only been *mise-en-scène*.

In *Three Into Two Won't Go*, Rod Steiger and Claire Bloom played a husband and wife at the butt-end of their marriage. Steiger and Bloom's real-life marriage had recently disintegrated, and there they were reenacting their miseries for the camera. Taylor and Burton, Dewhurst and Scott have done the same thing. Making love, bickering, pretending to feel what they had really felt—everything is grist for public

display. The “real” scenes between them, in the narrow confines of a kitchen or bedroom without a camera lens to carry the emotion to infinity, must have seemed unbearably unamplified. Why waste all that juicy emotion on just themselves? For beings like these the real world must seem shadowy and vague unless used as a locale for the recorded display of emotion. For them, true denizens of Bishop Berkeley's world, what goes unrecorded never truly happens.

Films are watched, photographs are looked at. “Looking” is considered intentful activity, adult scrutiny of an object. “Watching” is considered childish, passive, voyeuristic. Freeze frames and photographs within a film coolly alert the mind; we suddenly look intently, like intelligent adults, rather than watch for the next surprise, like idiot children. Photographs have elitist status in a film; they are incongruous “arrests” worthy *per se* of attention. In *Calling Northside 777*, the blown-up photo of a newsboy and what it signifies is the only epiphany in the film. In *Blow-Up* the photo enlargements are the film's distinction, the thing most worth looking at.

It's adult to be a walking camera, seeking out your own insights, performing your own tracks, pans, and close-ups. It's childish to gape in wonder at someone else's viewpoint, as if you were blind and had to be steered through the streets by a sighted helper. *Don't Look Now* has been admired for its visual brio. But, ultimately, are we stimulated or depressed by Nicolas Roeg's prestidigitations? Do we really want to watch Sutherland and Christie zipping through the Kama Sutra? Why should *they* be having all the fun? (Whatever reasons people go to films for, watching couples enjoying themselves more than the viewer possibly could—under the ideal guidance of the editor—is not one of them.) *Don't Look Now* demonstrates the true degradation of Plato's cave. Not that we are prisoners of images but that we are *spectators* of them. Rather than finding our own images we merely witness another's. And the more energetically strained the “show,” the less energized and more

constrained the viewer. When the images are, to quote Dr. Johnson's pained description of the metaphysical poets, "yoked by violence together" to yield certain metaphysical meanings either too obscure for comprehension or too strained for credibility, then it is indeed time to "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain," as the frantically prestidigitating Wizard of Oz tries to persuade Dorothy and her friends against the evidence of their own senses. Overt image manipulation equals overt viewer manipulation. In the best films there are those cool oases where the film stops—where we stop—to look. *Don't Look Now* never stops. It force-feeds us with its conjunctions, a pinball machine of visual analogues and concurrences. And like all such mechanisms there is no conceptual import beyond the perceptual connections. We find ourselves in a spiritual wasteland of sheerly visual correspondences. Though we are mistaken if we demand reality from a film, we do have a right to ask for what might be called "felt meaning." Life has it, why shouldn't film? And if life were as meaningless as Roeg's film, then wouldn't it be a worthy achievement of film to fill the void?



The subtext of films is never life, only other films (conversely, the subtext of life is film). *Fahrenheit 451* is supposedly a homage to the word, but the great literary classics of one's youth are lovingly sacrificed to the flames. The glory of the film is not books but book-burning. Words are apotheosized as they slowly blacken, curl, and disappear. The subtext of these stunning dissolutions is not fascism in the thirties, or even Dickens and Defoe, but the old cinematic

device of the calendar leaf, curling and finally being torn loose to convey the idea of passing time. Beginning with any film the true cinephile can free-associate a reverie at no point penetrable by daylight. In *Don't Look Now* Donald Sutherland ultimately finds himself confronted with an infernal version of his dead child. And we find ourselves with Vera Miles, confronting Norman Bates's mommy (or Mrs. Bates's mummy) in the fruit cellar. Underneath the color slide of Brando's upper-class Fletcher Christian is Gable's children's-book stereotype; Truffaut and Chabrol make films about Hitchcock's films; *Citizen Kane* reappears in *Day for Night*, *Red River* in *The Last Picture Show*, and *The Passion of Joan of Arc* in *My Life to Live*; Vincent Price's later career in hokey horror films is a whole substratum of *Theatre of Blood* (as is his only appearance in a Shakespearean film, *Tower of London*); the mute actress Elizabeth Vogler, in *Persona*, recalls no one so much as the mute magician, Vogler, in *The Magician*; *The Elusive Corporal* makes one think of *Grand Illusion*; the Dalio of *The Rules of the Game* has fallen upon lesser days in *Casablanca* and *To Have and To Have Not*. Actors remind us not of people, only of themselves in other films.

In the night sky the constellations remain constant throughout eternity. Bogart, Greenstreet, and Lorre stay in fixed relationship from film to film. Like the mortal deaths of their counterparts in ancient myth, theirs, too, have been transcended by star status. Their films are cryogenic capsules, or vampire coffins whose contents are destructible only if exposed to daylight. The constellations remain constant: von Sydow, Thulin, Björnstrand; Davis, Rains, Heintze; Brando, Steiger, Malden, Cobb; Wayne, Bond, McLaglen; Welles, Cotten, Coulouris, Sloan. In a passing auto, seeing the huge drive-in screens at night while the audience is invisible, one can imagine the planet after life has disappeared, with projectors left running and screens filled, a busy simulacrum of life without end, Plato's cave without the prisoners. Isn't that the condition of film screening, anyway? When

there are viewers, aren't they dead to the real world and "projected" on to the screen world? When the planet is lifeless, the night sky will still be populous.

Walter Benjamin explains modern man's mania for film as a need to "bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly . . . [and to] overcome the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction." (For "reproduction" substitute "image.") According to Susan Sontag, "The most grandiose result of the photographic enterprises is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads—as an anthology of images." Film is a way of defanging the real world by replacing it with a parallel world. The menace of reality—that it constantly demands either self-assertion or self-defense—is replaced by a photo album of one's favorite films. Imagery holds no danger except in dreams (where it is no different from the real world). The real world is other, is outside, is as alien as Mars. Film is instantaneously incorporated. We're not—dangerously—in it, it's—comfortably—in us. Even so, film might be somewhat threatening were it novel. But instead it is tautological. Even when we see a film the first time, genre expectations, iconographic conventions, familiarity with the actors all provide the security of ritual. When a film has already been seen, the feeling of cozy warmth is absolute. Film is addictive because of all human needs and of all film's satisfactions, recognition is foremost.

When the film addict occasionally finds himself, perforce, in the real world, film rescues him. The evidence that film doesn't reflect life but, on the contrary, is reflected by it is that one's old sled acquires a definite aura after Rosebud (contradicting Benjamin's assertion that film robs objects of their aura). Three flagpoles swaying in the cold night air and emitting a metallic sound in front of an empty administration building on a deserted college campus might at first sound a desolate echo in the heart of a lone passerby. But as soon as there is *recognition* (one remembers an analogous scene from

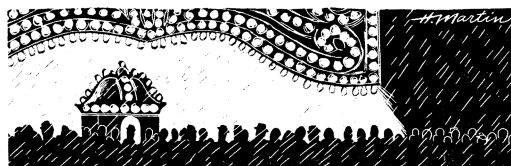
L'Eclisse), the alienation is gone. The landscape is even friendly. That's what Antonioni has done for us. A kind of Christ, he has assumed the pain of alienation for us so that whenever the otherness of a landscape threatens us we can be comforted by the realization that Antonioni has, overcoming his initial dismay, already colonized it. Antonioni has defanged the Martian aspect of our world by translating it into his films. The Martian aspect of our world is recognized as (in terms of) a reification of Antonioni, so that when we encounter it we experience *déjà-vu*, the tautology of life imitating art. We know the enemy, he already exists in art.

What the camera shoots and film presents are two different things. The latter consists of devices and effects—formal operations peculiar to the mechanics of the medium. Therefore, all naturalistic approaches to cinema are as ontologically confused as the naive viewer who shoots the villain. Those bullet holes will be in the hero when he occupies that space on the screen. What film's formal operations are able to achieve—in terms of imagery, space-time manipulations, etc.—are comparable only to dream operations. Therefore, it is no criticism of *Ryan's Daughter* and *Elvira Madigan* to label their images pathetic fallacies, for if dream imagery is made to fit the moods and passions of the dreamer, then film imagery should reflect and amplify the emotions of the characters. It is a criticism to say of those two films, the first in particular, that the pathetic fallacies are vapid clichés.

Though not "redemptive" of reality, film is analogous to reality in a number of ways. It, too, is both chronological and spatial, moves from cause to effect, depends on the motivation of agents, etc., etc. Film, like life, also seems to be entropic. This may be illusory, the apparently progressive fatigue of a film actually being the fatigue of the viewer. (A whole phenomenology of film viewing is as yet unexplored: the effect on response of the all-night viewings at the Elgin; the effect on response of multiple viewings of the same film, both in a limited time

span and at various periods in one's life; what kinds of film experience sharpen perception, what kinds dull; etc., etc.). Undoubtedly, viewer receptivity is greater initially, for the same reason that children's percepts are fresher than adults'. But there also seems to be something entropic in the very nature of films. The problem may be endemic to narrative structure. Stories, like life, wind down. Films wind down in the sense that the circles of action and interaction narrow and rigidify. What had been open-ended and limitless in possibility becomes deterministic and predictable. Films lose their options. They become straitjacketed by the development of their structural premises just as surely as lives do. A film's narrative fate, like a child's, is not that apparent at first. But as the film unfolds, ruling out certain possibilities just as surely as it seizes on others, it comes up with "answers," and when have answers ever been as marvelous as questions? An exception, perhaps, is *Vertigo*, in which the "explanation" for Madeleine takes the film, in the person of the mundane Judy, out of the realm of the supernatural into the more clearly defined—i.e., "limited"—but also more satisfyingly ironic, psychologically interesting world of human cause and effect. We then get a series of Pirandelloesque twists that more than compensate for the loss of mystery. But for most films the feeling that anything can happen dies painfully, without compensation. In retrospect everything is seen as a sacrifice to outcome. To think of the marvelous ambiguity of the first few minutes of *Don't Look Now* and then of the grand-guignol anticlimax is to weep. The first 20 minutes or so of *Jules et Jim* had an unpredictable, open-ended quality rarely seen in film before, but by the later sequences the film had lost almost all of its seeming spontaneity. The trio that has at first such flexible, non-excluding interaction with each other and the world becomes progressively rigid, narrow, predictable, and, ultimately, lifeless. Films run backward would blossom like flowers, but narrative, unfortunately, is unidirectional. In *Day for Night* Truffaut shows a stunt man's stunt run backwards, but he is not defeating entropy, only

cheating it momentarily. The filmic solution to personal entropy—provision made for the optional viewing of one's antecedent selves *in situ* for the rest of one's life—has no application to film entropy. Seeing a life over, though we already know its constricted destination, is an experience full of revelations. We've never really seen it because we've been in it. But seeing a film over, as godlike in our hindsight we are now equipped with significations for the early signs, may enable us to understand a few things better sooner, but for that very reason robs us of our initial response when all significations seemed possible.



When Susan Sontag referred to "mere images of the truth," her subject was still photography. The motion picture introduces its own time-space truths, undreamt of in Zeno's philosophy. How would Zeno have formulated the logical impossibility of movement over *unreal* space? On the other hand the jump cut and stop-action photography fit in nicely with Zeno's idea that motion is, in reality, a matter of "stills." Also consonant with Zeno's paradoxes is the very process of motion pictures: "truth 24 frames a second." No mysterious entity called *movement* takes place either within a frame or between frames. The projection process confirms the epistemological implication of Zeno's paradoxes, that motion is in the eye of the beholder. Zeno would be amused by the semantic paradox of "motion picture": a picture in motion? motion within a picture?

Film's condensations and ellipses, dissolves and cuts and intercuts, accelerations and decelerations, enlargements and reductions, reversals and composites seem to create the miraculous supernatural man has always been looking for. No clearer disparity exists between life and

film than life's resistance to time-space-identity manipulation and film's facility for it. The license is so total in film that there should be, as a control, a self-evident reason for every manipulation. A general effect of zaniness is insufficient reason for accelerated movement in *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*. The reason for the acceleration of the porno triangle scene in *A Clockwork Orange* is self-evident. Kurosawa's use of slow motion in the death of the kidnapper in the opening sequence of *Seven Samurai* compels us to look at death early in the film; later there will be only time to watch it. Roeg's deceleration of food-laden plates toppling and spilling over a fainting Julie Christie and of Donald Sutherland trying to resuscitate his drowned child is, in each case, an excess of manner over matter. But Hitchcock's backtrack into a mundane, indifferent street from a house in which murder is taking place is as pointed as Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus*.

Where life presents a generally unbroken time-space continuum, film consists of temporal-spatial fragments more or less obviously pieced together. More obviously in the Odessa steps sequence from *Potemkin*, the shower sequence from *Psycho*, the serial breakfast scenes spanning Kane's first marriage in *Citizen Kane*, the film-ending composite of *Persona*, the blow-up sequence from *Blow-Up*, the final bandit raid in *Seven Samurai*, and almost all of *Muriel*. Less obviously in the films of directors less self-conscious in their use of the medium, such as Ford, Hawks, Ozu, Renoir. Film is always reconstituting itself. Appearances and disappearance, being and non-being are the meat it feeds on. Since film images, like mental images, can be juggled in a way solid things can't, film disturbs our epistemological assumptions. Put another way: the formal operations of film correspond to the formal operations of the human mind as it observes, remembers, fantasizes, shifts its attention, etc., and therefore calls these operations into question.

An important distinction between our response to film and our response to the objective world is that in the case of film we are not

responding to things but to someone else's percepts of things. And these percepts join with each other to form their own structure, peculiar and autonomous. But though neither a window on nor a mirror of the objective world, film must appear to have some of the unforced, "uncut" quality of the objective world. When film seems too overtly selective in what it shows and doesn't show, so that our eyeballs ache like horses yanked around via reins, bit, and riding crop, ipso facto we have a bad film. A classic example is *See No Evil*, in which a murderer stalking a blind girl is continually depicted from his boots down, simply to conceal his identity from the audience. If he were only "sensed" from the heroine's limited point of view there might be some epistemological cogency to the film, but as it is the device is transparently only for our mystification. We are the ones with blinders, so adjusted that we see just so much of the villain. But since we can see everything else in the film's environment perfectly well, there is no sensory relationship between our limitation and the heroine's. Other examples include *The Other*, with its insulting zooms, pans, and cuts, and *8½*, whose montages are dumped like readymades into our optic-cortical laps (solipsists like Fellini never dream there are other nervous systems eager to make their own connections). Who could possibly be responsible for the kind of neatly tied perceptual bundles packaged for us in films like *8½* but a psychoanalyst or an over-manipulative director? The human mind, at any rate, either awake or dreaming, certainly doesn't form *Gestalten* like those. If film by its essence constantly reconstitutes its reality out of fragments, its wholes should be left holey—i.e., fragments should be left visible on the perceptual level, untranslated into significance—to give the viewer room to make his own hookups. For example, in *Don't Look Now* if the drowned girl, the gargoyle, and the homicidal gnome had been left to the viewer to juxtapose and interpret, the result would have been no more mystifying while the process of association would have been left to the grateful viewer (in either case the only con-

clusion to be drawn is that sheer visual correspondence can be as meaningless in film as in life). But then should Eisenstein's three lions be scattered rather than juxtaposed, as they are, in sequence to give the illusion of a single lion springing to its feet? No. Because the symbolic message—the People's spirit awakening—is (a) otherwise impossible to suggest in terms of the lion image, and (b) left to us to deduce. But in Roeg's case, we seem to be having some kind of coded message thrown at us, though actually there is none except what our own fancy can

superimpose.

If the essence of film is that what we see is whatever has been cut into the frame (and what we don't see has been, just as consciously, excluded from the frame), then a delicate balance must be kept between surprise and expectation. And by this criterion, too, *Don't Look Now* fails, over-weighted as it is toward surprise. The best films walk the tightrope: *Rules of the Game*, *L'Avventura*, *Vertigo*, *The Fire Within*, *Four Bags Full*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. Each unpredictable from shot to shot, yet inevitable.

HANS BARKHAUSEN

Footnote to the History of Riefenstahl's 'Olympia'

Leni Riefenstahl has maintained that her two 1936 Olympics films, *Fest der Völker* and *Fest der Schönheit*, were produced by her own company, commissioned by the organizing committee of the International Olympic Committee, and made over the protest of Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. In "Olympia, the Film of the Eleventh Olympic Games in Berlin, 1936," a paper written to defend herself in 1958, she says: "The truth is that neither the Ministry of Propaganda nor other National Socialist party or government bodies had any influence on the Olympic Games or on the production or design of the Olympia films."

The voluminous documentary material of the former Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment and the materials of the former Reich Ministry of Finances, today deposited in the Federal Archives in Koblenz (the central depository of the Federal Republic of Germany) tell a different story.

These records show that the two Olympia films were financed by the Nazi government, that the Olympia Film Company was founded by that government, that the government made money by distributing the films through the

Tobis-Filmkunst Company, and that the government, finally, ordered the liquidation of the Olympia Film Company, in which Leni Riefenstahl and her brother were partners.

The true story of the origin of the two Olympics films of 1936 begins with a short memo written in the Reich Finance Ministry on October 16, 1935, saying: "On the order of Herr Minister Goebbels, Ministerial Counselor Ott, on October 15, proposed the following special appropriations to me: (1) for promotion of the Olympic Games: RM 300–350,000; (2) for the Olympic film: RM 1,500,000."

Ministerial Counselor Ott was the budget expert in the Propaganda Ministry, much respected, and rather liberal by the standards of the times. A carbon of the memo was sent to him by the Finance Ministry, and he initialed it on October 17, 1935. The words "to me" evidently refer to the section chief in charge in the Finance Ministry; his name in the note is recorded only by his initial "M."

The memo continues, with reference to point (2), that is, the Olympic film:

"The Ministry of Propaganda submits the draft of a contract for the production of a film of the